

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ A process for the continuous manufacture of an austenitic stainless steel strip (3) having a dull surface appearance with a brightness of less than 30 and an arithmetic mean roughness Ra of greater than 0.12 μm , of the annealed/pickled type, the process comprising ~~the steps consisting in:~~

- subjecting a cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip (3) to a heat treatment in a bright annealing furnace (4) inside which a flushing gas chosen from inert or reducing gases [[,]] and having a dew point above -15°C circulates, said flushing gas ~~optionally~~ comprising less than 1% oxygen by volume [[or]] and less than 1% air by volume, said heat treatment comprising a heating phase at a heating rate V1, a soak phase at a temperature T for a soak time M, followed by a cooling phase at a cooling rate V2, in order to obtain a strip (3) covered with an oxide layer; and
- pickling the strip (3) ~~having undergone the heat treatment~~, covered with an oxide layer using an acid pickling solution ~~suitable for~~ capable of completely removing said oxide layer according to its thickness and its nature.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the dew point of said flushing gas is between -10 and 30°C.

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 2, wherein the dew point is between -5 and 10°C.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein said flushing gas ~~[[is]]~~ comprises at least one gas ~~chosen~~ selected from the group of gases consisting of argon, hydrogen, and nitrogen.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the heat treatment of the cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip (3) is carried out at a rate V1 of greater than 10°C/s, a soak temperature T between 1050 and 1150°C, and a soak time M between 1 s and 120 s, and in the cooling phase said strip (3) is cooled at a rate V2 of greater than 10°C/s down to a temperature of 200°C or below.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the heat treatment of the cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip (3) is carried out using an induction heating device.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the heat treatment of the cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip (3) is carried out using a resistance heating device.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the acid pickling solution is ~~chosen from an~~ aqueous ~~solutions~~ solution comprising at least one acid selected from the group of acids consisting of nitric acid, hydrofluoric acid and ~~sulphuric~~ sulfuric acid.

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 8, wherein
the ~~pickling solution is chosen from aqueous solutions comprising~~ solution comprises
hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid, ~~and or~~
the aqueous solutions comprising solution comprises hydrofluoric acid and further
comprises ferric ions Fe^{3+} .

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 9, wherein
the ~~pickling solution is an~~ aqueous solution ~~containing~~ comprises 10 to 80 g/l hydrofluoric
acid and 60 to 140 g/l nitric acid.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 10, wherein
the ~~pickling solution is an~~ aqueous solution ~~containing~~ comprises 30 to 50 g/l hydrofluoric
acid and 80 to 120 g/l nitric acid.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 9, wherein
the ~~pickling solution is an~~ aqueous solution ~~containing~~ comprises 5 to 100 g/l hydrofluoric
acid and 1 to 150 g/l ferric ions.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 12, wherein
the ~~pickling solution is an~~ aqueous solution ~~containing~~ comprises 30 to 80 g/l hydrofluoric
acid and 30 to 50 g/l ferric ions.

Claim 14 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein
~~, in order to pickle the austenitic stainless steel strip (3), said~~ in the pickling the strip covered
with an oxide layer is sprayed with the acid pickling solution.

Claim 15 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein ~~, in order to pickle the austenitic stainless steel strip (3), said in the pickling the strip (3)~~ covered with an oxide layer is immersed in a pickling bath containing said ~~the~~ acid pickling solution.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the temperature of the acid pickling solution is between 20 and 100°C.

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 16, wherein the temperature of the acid pickling solution is between 50 and 80°C.

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): ~~Process~~ The process according to Claim 1, wherein the time during which the strip is in contact with the acid pickling solution is between 10 s and 2 min.

Claim 19 (New): The process according to Claim 1, wherein in the pickling the oxide layer is completely removed from the strip covered with an oxide layer.